United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1335
22 February 1993

MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council decides to establish international war crimes tribunal for prosecution of persons responsible for violations of international humanitarian law in ex-Yugoslavia; asks Secretary-General to submit proposals for swift implementation of today's decision.

+ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees decides to resume full relief operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina after receiving assurances from all three warring parties for their cooperation.

+ Talks between Angolan Government and UNITA to resume in Addis Ababa on Friday, 26 February, according to Secretary-General's Special Representative for Angola.

+ Secretary-General to travel to Washington D.C. tomorrow for meeting with President Clinton on wide variety of international issues.

+ Commission on Human Rights decides to appoint Special Rapporteur to investigate Israel's violations of human rights in occupied Arab territories, including Palestine; also adopts resolutions on situation in Cambodia and on use of mercenaries.

+ Iraq protests decision by Compensation Commission that it should pay interests on compensation for damages inflicted during Persian Gulf war, saying resolution 687 (1991) "made no reference to question of interest".

+ World Food Programme says Angola is on brink of breakdown as hunger and disease threaten 3 million people.

+ Italy to contribute $10 million in aid to United Nations Trust Fund for Humanitarian Assistance Programme in Mozambique.

* * *

(more)

Determined to put an end to the war crimes committed in the territory of former Yugoslavia, the Security Council has decided today to establish a war crimes tribunal for prosecution of persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed there since 1991.

The Council took that action by adopting unanimously resolution 808 (1993) by which it asked the Secretary-General to submit, in no later than 60 days, a report containing his proposals for the effective and expeditious implementation of today's decision.

The Council last October established a five-member Expert Commission to examine and analyse information received from Member States on grave breaches of the Geneva Convention and other violations of international humanitarian law. In an earlier interim report, the Expert Commission had welcomed the establishement of a tribunal. Moreover, the Co-Chairmen of the Sterring Committee of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia had also recoomended the creation of an international tribunal for war crimes.

Under the resolution, the Council expressed its conviction that, in the particular circumstances of the former Yugoslavia, the creation of an international tribunal would contribute to the restoration and the maintenance of peace.

Speaking after the vote, the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Jean-Bernard Mérimée, described the Council's action today as "a decision of major significance". For the first time in history, he said, the United Nations would be setting up an international criminal jurisdiction, which would be competent to try those who have committed serious war crimes on the territory of former Yugoslavia.

He noted that prosecution of the guilty was a clear message to those who continued to commit crimes that they would be held responsible for their acts. It was with those considerations in mind, he said, that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roland Dumas, had asked a group of jurists to draw up a report on establishing an international criminal tribunal. The report had been made public as a Security Council document.

Madeleine K. Albright, the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, said today's "historic" resolution was the first step to establishing an ad hoc tribunal on war crimes. The United States would, in cooperation with the United Nations, exert every effort to ensure that those individuals involved in the "outrageous and heinous" crimes were identified and held accountable for their actions, she said.

Ms. Albright recalled that the Nuremberg principles on war crimes and the crimes against peace and humanity were adopted by the General Assembly in 1948. By today's resolution, she noted, the Council had shown that the will of the Organization could be exercised even if it had taken nearly half a century. And, unlike the world of the 1940's, the international humanitarian law today was impressively codified, well understood, agreed upon and enforceable, she said.

(more)

Addressing correspondents following the Council meeting, Ms. Albright said that today's action was part of an overall policy of more active American engagement in trying to deal with the situation in the former Yugoslavia.

* * *

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, decided on Sunday, 21 February, to resume full relief operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina after receiving assurances from all three warring parties that they would no longer hinder the delivery or distribution of humanitarian relief.

According to a press release issued by the agency, the decision came following consultations with Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on the positive developments on the ground. They agreed to accept the proferred assurances and resume the operation as soon as possible.

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata said it would appear that her decision to partially suspend the relief operations, combined with the strong supporting statements from the Security Council and the Eruopean Community as well as the personal intervention of the Secretary-General, might have produced the desired results.

* * *

The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Angola, Margaret Anstee, said today that talks between the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Government of Angola were scheduled to resume this Friday, in Addis Ababa.

According to a United Nations spokesman, she cautioned that the date was still tentative since some logistical details still had to be worked out, but plans were already moving forward. The spokesman said the main purpose of the talks was to reach agreement on the reinstatement of the cease-fire and the return to the implementation of the 1991 Peace Accords. Other matters to be discussed would include the future role of the United Nations in the context of the agreements reached; the release and treatment of prisoners; and the seriously deteriorating humanitarian situation.

* * *

It was announced today that Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali would travel to Washington D.C. tomorrow for a meeting with United States President Bill Clinton on a wide range on international issues, in particular the the cooperation between the United States and the United Nations with regard to Cambodia, Somalia and Yugoslavia Other

* * *

(more)

The Commission on Human Rights decided last Thursday to appoint a Special Rapporteur to investigate Israel's violations of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine.

According to a United Nations press officer in Geneva, the Commission gave the Rapporteur a mandate to receive communications and hear witnesses and to report his conclusions and recommendations to the Commission on Human Rights at its future sessions, until the end of the Israeli occupation. The Commission called upon Israel to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur.

In other resolutions adopted on Thursday, the Commission reaffirmed the inalienable right of Palestinian people to self-determination without external interference, and urged the Government of Israel to abstain from installing settlers, including immigrants, in the occupied territories. It emphasized that the displaced persons must be allowed to return to their homes and to recover their properties.

By yet another resolution, the Commission asked the Secretary-General to ensure a continued United Nations human rights presence in Cambodia after the expiry of the mandate of the United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC) in that country in order to manage the implementation of educational, advisory services and technical assistance programmes, and to assist the Government of Cambodia, established after the elections, to meet its obligations under human rights instruments.

The Commission also reaffirmed that the recruitment, use and financing and training of mercenaries should be considered as offences of grave concern to all States. It urged all States to prevent mercenaries from using their territory to destabilize any sovereign State.

* * *

Iraq has protested a decision taken by the United Nations Compensation Commission asking it to pay interests on compensation for damages inflicted during the Persian Gulf war, saying that the so-called cease-fire resolution had "made no reference to the question of interest". Under resolution 687 (1991), which set out the conditions for the cease-fire in the Persian Gulf war, Iraq was held liable for any direct loss, damage, including environmental damage, suffered by third countries in the Gulf conflict.

In a letter to the President of the Council, dated 13 February, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, said the decision to impose interests on compensation conflicted with legal principles and the trend followed in the peace treaties following the Second World War. It also conflicted "fundamentally with the principles of justice and fairness", he said.

He called on the Security Council to take the necessary steps to abrogate the decision and reaffirm compliance with its resolutions on this matter, without any "overextension in the area of compensation".

(more)

Meanwhile, in another letter addressed to the Secretary-General, dated 15 February, the Iraqi Foreign Minister said the United Nations Sanctions Committee had "revealed a transparent insistence on continuing to inflict damage on the Iraqi people and deprive it of the most elementary requirements for its daily life".

The Iraqi people, he wrote, had stated its desire to turn over a new page in dealing with the new United States Administration. He expressed the hope that the Administration would respond to the efforts by Iraq, influencing positively on the meetings of the Sanctions Committee.
S/25305, S/25298

* * *

In Angola, a new wave of killings and destruction is threatening an additional 1.5 million people displaced by civil war in the country, the World Food Programme (WFP) has reported.

In a press release issued at Headquarters, WFP Director Philippe Borel described the situation as "the worst that can happen to a country". Reporting that a total of 3 million people were now in need of food assistance, he announced that the agency was trying to bring more food into Angola quickly. He also criticized the lack of security and power failures, hampering the discharge of food and threatening WFP relief workers of whom four were killed recently.

In a separate announcement, the WFP said it would provide emergency relief food to 50,000 Togolese refugees in Ghana during the next six months. According to the agency, about 300,000 people had fled civil unrest in Togo to neighboring countries Benin and Ghana.

* * *

The Government of Italy has expressed its intention to contribute $10 million in aid to the United Nations Trust Fund for Humanitarian Assistance Programme in Mozambique.

At a meeting at Headquarters on Friday, 19 February, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Eliasson was informed by the Italian Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Carmelo Azzara, that his Government would contribute the amount, which is part of the sum pledged by Italy at the Donors Conference for Mozambique held in Rome in December last year. The funds will be used to support relief assistance, reintegration, demobilization and demining operations in Mozambique.

Agreement was also reached to proceed with the establishment of a joint consultative mechanism between Italy and the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Assistance Coordination (UNOHAC) in Maputo, in order to define and facilitate the implementation of activities to be supported by the contribution.

* *** *